

## NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP STUDY OF THE BOOK OF JUDGES

### PART THREE - CHAPTERS 6-8

The previous two chapters describe three of the enemies of Israel, three defeats and three deliverers who gave them victory again. They were defeated when they followed the gods of the neighbours instead of the true God, just as we are defeated when in our hearts we are listening to another view of the world other than the true one. But victory began for the Israelites with a cry of repentance to God as it still does for us. The Lord always had a saviour waiting to set them free; He still does, Jesus Christ.

The first enemy was the king of Mesopotamia who enslaved the Israelites for 8 years. It is amazing how long Christians will put up with the misery of defeat when they could be enjoying victory in Christ. The first deliverer was no surprise. Othniel had already demonstrated his faith which had led to victory at home and a strong Christ-based marriage.(1:13-15) His secret was the Holy Spirit(3:10) who was his strength and enabled him to lead his people to discover what happened when God's word was the basis of their lives. A generation of peace followed among people who committed themselves and their families to God for life.

The next enemy was the king of Moab, Eglon, who was described as a very fat man, presumably the result of indulging self too long at the table. The Moabites and their allies, the Ammonites, were the result of incest while Lot was drunk. The Amalekites were descended from Jacob's brother, Esau, who was more interested in his stomach than in God's plan for his life. Together they are all reminders of our enemy, the flesh, our self centred nature. The saviour God raised up was Ehud, whose name means 'strong'. He did two things for Israel; first he carried the tribute to Eglon, and so paid the price for their sin; secondly he stuck his sword into Eglon till 'the dirt came out'. The sword in the Bible so often pictures the word of God,(Heb.4:12) which shows us the grubby truth of who we really are inside. Because of the death and resurrection of Jesus, the power of the flesh is dead as well as the penalty of sin being paid.

The third enemy was Jabin, king of Hazor, whose namesake over a hundred years before had been the evil organiser of opposition to the Israelites occupying their land. The evil organiser who opposes our enjoyment of God's best is the Devil whose chief instrument is temptation. Who was the deliverer this time? Deborah was God's means of teaching the principle of victory but not the deliverer as such. Barak might have been the deliverer had he really believed the message he was given. In the end the real instrument of the enemy's defeat was a tent peg driven through Sisera's head! God uses unusual means to illustrate His eternal plan. The tent peg is a picture of Christ in Isa.22:23 and Zech.10:4; it literally fulfilled the promise in Gen.3:15 to bruise the Devil on the head. Temptation attacks us in the mind, and so it is there that victory is needed and is available when we reckon our old way of thinking dead with Christ.

The hymn of Deborah and Barak in chapter 5 would hardly make it into a modern book of Christian songs with its graphic description of Sisera's head being smashed in! Perhaps our modern hymns are missing some of the vivid reality of this one.

Once again a whole generation enjoyed the fruit of victory over the one who pictured the Devil.(5:31) If we really grasp this principle the effect will be lifelong.

6:1-6 Q.1 Who was the new enemy to enslave Israel? They succeeded by sheer overwhelming numbers. What enemy might they represent in our lives? What position did they force the Israelites into? Why did the Lord allow all this to happen? What was the enemy's technique? How long did Israel put up with the problem this time?

6:7-10 Q.2 When Israel finally remembered God again what was the first step in God's response? What lesson can we learn from this? What story did their prophet remind them of and why?

6:11-18 Q.3 Who appeared to Gideon? What does this teach us about how God begins to help a society which realises its need of Him? Why didn't Gideon immediately respond by making himself available to God? How did the Lord deal with his doubts? How does He do the same for us?

6:19-24 Q.4 What discovery did Gideon now make about the angel? What effect did it have upon him? What is the first step for all of us towards effective service?

6:25-32 Q.5 Where did Gideon's Christian witness have to begin? What effect did this have upon his family and his community?

6:33-40 Q.6 What problem did Israel now face? What was the secret of Gideon's response as a leader? How was he able to make such a brave response? What can we learn from the story of Gideon and the fleece? Is it an example of faith?

7:1-8 Q.7 How did God reduce the size of Gideon's army? Why did He do it? Didn't it just make the situation harder for Gideon? Does God do this to us?

7:9-15 Q.8 Yet again God deals with Gideon's fears. How did He do it this time? What was Gideon's reaction?

7:16-25 Q.9 How was the battle with the Midianites eventually fought? What can we learn from the way Gideon led his army?

8:1-21 Q.10 Various groups of Israelites who were not part of the battle reacted to victory in different ways? What were their motives and what can we learn from how Gideon handled them?

8:22-35 Q.11 What tragic mistake did Gideon make after the battles were over? How can we easily do the same as leaders whom God has used? What effect did his mistake have on his community and his family?